United Nations ST/IC/2017/9

Secretariat

31 January 2017

# Information circular*

To: Members of the staff

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

Subject: **Language and Communications Programme at Headquarters, 2017**

1. Language courses in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish are organized to promote linguistic balance and multilingualism within the Secretariat and to improve the language abilities of staff, as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolutions 2480 B (XXIII), 43/224 D and 50/11. The courses provide staff members with the opportunity to learn the official languages of the Organization and to improve their communication skills.

2. The present information circular includes information on the official policies of the Language and Communications Programme at Headquarters. It contains information on the course calendar for 2017, the types of language courses available, registration procedures, communication skills training and other information, including where to address enquiries.

## I. Course calendar for 2017

3. The Language and Communications Programme offers courses and other learning activities three terms per year, as explained in the language learning section of the human resources portal (https://hr.un.org/page/language-learning). The relevant dates for 2016-2017 are as follows:

**2017 winter term (12 weeks)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Registration for placement tests: | 7 November 2016 |
| Registration for courses beginning the week of 4 January 2017: | 21 November-22 December 2016 |

* Expiration date of the present information circular: 31 December 2017.



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|---|---|
| Registration for all other courses: | Two weeks prior to the course start date |
| Last day to drop a regular course: | 10 January 2017 |
| Last day to drop a specialized course: | 24 hours after the first class |
| Language classes: | 4 January-24 March 2017 |
| End-of-term examinations: | 27-31 March 2017 |

**2017 spring term (12 weeks)**

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| Registration for placement tests: | 22 February 2017 |
| Registration for courses: | 6 March-4 April 2017 |
| Last day to drop a regular course: | 24 April 2017 |
| Last day to drop a specialized course: | 24 hours after the first class |
| Language classes: | 17 April-7 July 2017 |
| End-of-term examinations: | 10-14 July 2017 |

**2017 fall term (12 weeks)**

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|---|---|
| Registration for placement tests: | 6 June 2017 |
| Registration for courses: | 27 June-30 August 2017 |
| Last day to drop a regular course: | 18 September 2017 |
| Last day to drop a specialized course: | 24 hours after the first class |
| Language classes: | 11 September-1 December 2017 |
| End-of-term examinations: | 4-8 December 2017 |

## II. Types of language courses

4. Two types of language courses are offered each term: regular and specialized.

### Regular courses

5. Regular courses range from beginner (level 1) to intermediate or advanced (level 9), depending on the language. The courses focus on all language skills — speaking, listening, writing, reading and interacting — and are aimed at developing both fluency and accuracy.

6. Regular courses typically meet for a total of three hours per week for 12 weeks. Lessons may last one hour to one and a half hours, and usually take place two or three times a week. Lessons may start at the following times:

Before work: 8 or 8.30 a.m.

At lunchtime: 12, 12.30, 1, 1.30 or 2 p.m.

After work: 5, 5.30 or 6 p.m.

7. Other course formats or schedules may be offered during the year.

**Specialized courses**

8. Specialized courses focus on particular language skills, tasks or topics to develop proficiency in the language. These courses may meet for only one or two hours per week, and may last fewer than 12 weeks.

9. Specialized courses vary by term, and new ones are introduced to address the needs of participants in the Programme. Examples include preparatory courses for the language proficiency examinations and learning activities that focus on improving spoken fluency or promoting cultural awareness.

10. In order to accommodate staff mobility and flexible working arrangements, some specialized courses are now being provided in alternative formats:

(a) **Online synchronous learning**. Usually offered through WebEx;

(b) **Online asynchronous learning**. Participants complete coursework on their own time and schedule;

(c) **Blended learning**. Participants complete some coursework either in a traditional classroom or through WebEx and some coursework on their own time.

# III. Registration

**Eligibility**

11. Internal learners are United Nations staff members with a United Nations grounds pass and an appointment valid until the end of their chosen course.[1] Using their Inspira account (https://inspira.un.org), they may register for language courses, including online options, at no cost. Secretariat staff at duty stations other than Headquarters are eligible only for online learning options (see para. 10 above).

12. External learners are all other applicants, including retirees, staff of United Nations funds and programmes and delegates and staff of permanent missions to the United Nations. They must enrol using an external account (https://elearning.un.org) and may be eligible for language courses, including online options, either at no cost or for a fee (see information about paying participants in para. 53). They must have

[1] Participants whose grounds pass expires before the end of their chosen course must provide a letter from their supervisor or executive office indicating that in all probability their contract will be extended at least until the date of the last lesson (or final examination) of the course. The letter must be attached to the registration request in Inspira.

a United Nations grounds pass valid until the end of the course for which they register.

13. Detailed information on eligibility is available in the language learning section of the human resources portal (https://hr.un.org/page/language-learning).

**Role of the supervisor**

14. Participants are encouraged to discuss with their supervisor any plan to take language classes in the Programme, and to agree on a learning plan before submitting their registration.

15. Supervisors are expected to implement gender parity and equality in the workplace. With regard to the learning of language and communication skills, they must encourage male and female staff members, equally, to participate in available courses.

16. Supervisors, taking into account the exigencies of service and requests received from other staff members, are encouraged to consider the approval of such requests.

17. Staff members in New York are entitled to a one-hour lunch break, which may be used for in-house training, such as a language class. In this case, it is recommended that supervisors grant an additional 20 minutes for a quick meal before or after the class.

18. For lunchtime courses that last more than 60 minutes, it is recommended that supervisors and staff members agree on the coverage of duties.

**Registration priorities and deadlines**

19. Applications are processed on a first-come, first-served basis; however, in the following cases, priority is given to participants who have not previously taken the course:

(a) When the number of applications for a specialized course is higher than the maximum allowed;

(b) When an applicant wishes to repeat a regular course after successful completion.

**Course schedules**

20. Participants may search for language course schedules either in Inspira or on the human resources portal (https://hr.un.org/language-programmes-unhq).

**Registration procedures**

*General information*

21. Registration for language courses and placement tests at Headquarters must be completed in Inspira. Relevant communications must also be submitted in Inspira. No in-person registration is available, although registration help sessions are provided to assist applicants.

22. Access to Inspira and the registration process are different for internal and external learners. Step-by-step instructions are available from http://hr.un.org/page/language-learning.

23. Participants in the Language and Communications Programme are responsible for reading and following all registration guidelines, rules and policies in the present circular and those found on the human resources portal.

24. Participants cannot register for two sections of the same course (same level and/or content but at different times or days) in a single term.

25. Registration does not guarantee enrolment in a placement test or course if, for example, the participant does not meet course eligibility requirements, the course overlaps with another course or required documents are not attached in Inspira by the stipulated deadline.

**Placement tests**

26. Only beginners may enrol directly in level 1. A participant must take a placement test for a language if he or she is:

(a) A non-native speaker who is new to the Programme and has some knowledge of the language;

(b) A returning participant who has not taken a course in that language in the Programme for the past two consecutive terms or more.

27. Participants who can provide proof of their level of proficiency in a language may contact the respective coordinator for a written waiver of the placement test requirement and for course recommendations.

28. Placement test results are valid for two terms following the date of placement at a course level. The respective coordinator will provide a list of suggested courses with the placement results.

29. Participants enrolled in a course who miss or fail their end-of-term examination (or any alternative form of course assessment) cannot request to take a placement test instead. They must re-register at the same level for either of the two subsequent terms.

**Maximum number of enrolments per term**

30. Participants may register for courses in different languages up to a maximum of five hours per week. However, registration is limited to one regular course per term.

31. Prior authorization from the Head of the Language and Communications Programme is required in order to register within the same term for:

(a) Two regular courses in two different languages;

(b) More than five hours per week of language and communications training.

32. Work-related justifications for enrolment in multiple courses will be given priority consideration. Requests for more than one lunchtime course per day require prior approval from both the participant's supervisor (with the exception of retirees) and the Head of the Language and Communications Programme.

**Confirmation of enrolment**

33. Automated enrolment confirmations including all course details are sent by e-mail by the end of the week preceding the beginning of the term. After that period, registrants who have not received any confirmation may contact the respective language coordinator. Only participants who receive such e-mail notifications have been successfully enrolled in a course. It is therefore critical that participants maintain accurate and up-to-date contact information in Inspira.

34. Participants who attend classes without having been successfully registered through Inspira are in violation of the Secretary-General's bulletin entitled "Status, basic rights and duties of United Nations staff members" (ST/SGB/2002/13). Participants who are not on the attendance list for the class that they wish to attend should contact learning@un.org or the language coordinator.

**Course cancellations**

35. A course that does not have the minimum number of participants required may be cancelled. In such cases, participants will be notified by the language coordinator. As a special courtesy, participants who were registered in the cancelled course may be enrolled by the coordinator into another course appropriate to their level and needs if that option exists and the student agrees.

**Late arrival**

36. Participants who are unable to attend from the course start date must inform their teacher or the appropriate language coordinator of their late arrival no later than six days after the first class.

37. After that period, the participant's enrolment may be cancelled. The participant will be duly notified.

**Cancellation or change of enrolment by the participant**

38. Enrolled participants who are unable to attend the course are advised to cancel their registration as soon as possible to allow other participants to take their place. Participants must cancel their registration in Inspira by the deadline for dropping the course or incur a fee.

39. Opportunities to change to a different course or level after enrolment are limited. Participants must contact the relevant language coordinator as soon as possible and no later than the indicated deadline for dropping the course.

40. Any change of course or level is final.

**Participants added to a course from the waiting list**

41. Wait-listed participants should regularly check their "My learning" page in Inspira to see if their status for the course has changed from "wait-listed" to "enrolled". If the status has changed to "enrolled":

(a) It is the participant's responsibility to catch up on the course content and assignments (if the requirements seem too difficult or the participant's work

schedule has changed, he or she may drop the course before attending a second session);

(b) Wait-listed participants will not be liable for absences prior to their enrolment.

**Attendance and punctuality**

42. The punctuality of teachers and participants is an important part of the learning process. Participants are responsible for attending and actively participating in the language classes in which they are enrolled. They are expected to be present throughout the term on a regular basis and to complete the course assignments.

43. In all cases, participants must inform their teacher in advance if they will arrive late, leave early or be absent. The teacher may provide an opportunity for the participant to make up for the work missed, but is not required to do so.

**Absenteeism and penalty fees**

44. Participants who remain enrolled in the courses and do not attend at all (no-shows) or do not attend the minimum number of lessons (incomplete attendance) will be charged a fee of $125 (see paras. 57-59 on how to pay fees). This policy is designed to encourage staff to take enrolment seriously. Instances of no-shows and incomplete attendance have financial ramifications for the Organization and must therefore be kept to a minimum.

45. Participants may be charged both an incomplete attendance fee and a no-show fee per term. However, the maximum payment shall not exceed $125 per course and $250 per term.

46. Paying participants are not subject to penalty fees.

*No-show fee*

47. The no-show fee is payable when a participant was enrolled in a course in one or both of the two previous terms and:

(a) Did not attend any lesson in that course;

(b) Did not drop his or her registration on time in Inspira.

*Incomplete attendance fee*

48. The incomplete attendance fee is payable for all types of courses if a participant:

(a) Failed the end-of-term examination or assessment without having met the minimum attendance requirement (75 per cent of regular courses or 65 per cent of specialized courses);

(b) Did not take the end-of-term examination or assessment, even if he or she had good attendance.

*Penalty fee waiver*

49. Both the no-show fee and the incomplete attendance fee are automatically waived if participants leave a gap of two consecutive terms before returning to the Programme (in which case participants are required to take a placement test).

50. Participants who owe an incomplete attendance or no-show fee and wish to register in one of the next two terms can request a waiver if they provide any of the following:

(a) A sick leave certificate covering the absences;

(b) A copy of a mission assignment of which they were not aware at the time of registration (certification from the supervisor may be required);

(c) An official letter or e-mail from the supervisor (notes verbales are not accepted) clearly indicating the supervisor's title and contact information, as well as the duration of the absence, and explaining that the participant had a change in work assignment that interfered with course attendance.

51. All waiver requests must contain a written justification and cover the entire period of absence in the case of either consecutive absences or several non-consecutive absences (change in work assignment, sick leave, mission travel, etc.).

52. Participants must attach to their registration request in Inspira any documents that may justify a waiver. Waiver requests submitted in person or sent by e-mail will not be accepted.

**Paying participants**

53. Fees for each type of course are based on the number of lesson hours, as follows:

(a) Regular courses (up to 36 hours): $450

(b) Specialized courses:

(i) 26-30 hours: $400

(ii) 21-25 hours: $300

(iii) 16-20 hours: $200

(iv) 10-15 hours: $150

(v) Up to 9 hours: $100

54. United Nations official holidays and closures due to inclement weather may affect the total number of hours of some courses. All efforts will be made to replace any hours lost, but that may not be possible in some cases. No refunds will be given.

55. Payments due at the time of registration may include new fees for courses in the upcoming term and outstanding fees due from any previous terms.

56. Paying participants are required to pay full tuition upon registration. They must pay in full to repeat a course, regardless of their attendance. Neither a refund nor a credit for future terms will be issued.

**Payment**

57. All payments must be made at the Cashier's Office, located on the 20th floor of the Secretariat Building. The office is open from 10 a.m. to 3.30 p.m., Monday to Friday.

58. Payment must be made in cash or by cheque (payable to the United Nations). Credit cards are not accepted, in accordance with Cashier's Office policy.

59. Participants should indicate that their payment is "to be credited to the United Nations for the Language and Communications Programme". Participants must upload the proof of payment with their registration request in Inspira.

## IV. Communication skills training

60. Communication skills training is aimed at improving work-related writing and oral presentation skills in the official languages of the Organization, in line with the recommendations of the Secretary-General contained in his report entitled "Overview of human resources management reform: towards a global, dynamic, adaptable and engaged workforce for the United Nations" (see A/71/323).

61. More information on communication skills training is provided on the human resources portal (http://hr.un.org/page/language-learning).

**Eligibility**

62. To participate in communication skills training, participants must have a high level of proficiency in the relevant language and have work duties that allow them to immediately apply what they are learning. For example, in order to participate in a course on the principles of report-writing, the staff member must currently write United Nations reports.

**Department-specific training**

63. Departments of the United Nations Secretariat with staff who perform writing or speaking tasks may request tailor-made courses for their specific needs. Further information can be obtained by contacting the relevant language coordinator.

## V. Additional information

**Course materials**

64. Participants are responsible for purchasing any textbooks or other course materials, as instructed by the teacher or coordinator during the first week of the term. Required textbooks may be available for purchase under special arrangements with vendors located in the United Nations Learning Centre for Multilingualism and Career Development (NL-3B).

**Assessment**

*Regular courses*

65. Assessment is an integral and mandatory part of the regular courses of the Language and Communications Programme. Participants who do not take the assessment required to validate their level in a given course will be subject to an incomplete attendance fee, even if they attended regularly.

66. Participants may, however, submit, in advance, a written explanation to the relevant coordinator if they are unable to take the assessment. The coordinator will then determine whether the reasons provided justify a make-up assessment.

67. In order to advance to the next level in a language, participants must pass all components of the end-of-term examination or continuous evaluation, if offered (the passing score is 65 points out of 100).

68. Participants who pass a level but choose to repeat may do so in the following term only. Repeating participants are not required to take the final examination again and will be able to join the next level the following term without paying an incomplete attendance fee, unless they do not meet the required 75 per cent attendance.

*Score reports*

69. The results of course assessments will be posted and will be accessible to participants in Inspira.

*Specialized courses*

70. Specialized courses do not have end-of-term examinations and passing a course requires a minimum of 65 per cent attendance and a 65 per cent score on evaluation criteria provided by the teacher at the beginning of the course. Some courses may require the completion of a final project in addition to the attendance requirement. Evaluation scores for specialized courses do not appear in Inspira.

## VI. Enquiries

71. For general enquiries and information, participants may contact the Language and Communications Programme:

(a) In person at the United Nations Learning Centre (NL-3B), 2.00-3.30 p.m., Monday to Thursday;

(b) By e-mail: learning@un.org;

(c) By phone:

(i) Maria Catherina David-Dakay, Human Resources Assistant, 917-367-2623;

(ii) Koji Kitagawa, Staff Development Assistant, 212-963-8726.

72. For pedagogical enquiries or to arrange appointments, participants may contact:

(a) Arabic Programme Coordinator: Riadh Bounatirou, 212-963-8535

(b) Chinese Programme Supervisor: Yong Ho, 212-963-2481

(c) English Programme Coordinator: Jodi Nooyen, 212-963-2001

(d) French Programme Coordinator: Pascal Schaller, 212-963-0634

(e) Russian Programme Head Teacher: Anna Dvigubski, 212-963-7063

(f) Spanish Programme Coordinator: Fernando López-Murcia, 212-963-4344

73. For additional enquiries, participants may contact Felipe Martín-Saráchaga, Head of the Language and Communications Programme (martinsarachaga@un.org).